



Arms open for kids needing adoption

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By John Agar

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After raising eight children, Ned and Rinda, in their late 50s, did not think they could adopt the two foster children they came to know while driving a church bus Wednesday nights.

But they became very attached to the children while trying to find them a home. At church, they asked everyone: Can you adopt these kids?

"One day, I just said, 'I think it should be us,' " Ned said.

"Me, too," Rinda replied.

Now, after adopting the children earlier this year, they cannot imagine life any other way. The children -- a 10-year-old girl and a 12-year-old boy -- are among 50 older children who find homes in Kent County every year.

Statewide, they are among 2,550 children placed into adoptive homes from the foster-care system for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30. About 6,200 children are in the foster system, with 4,500 hoping to be adopted.

Last Tuesday, many adoptive families, courts and adoption workers celebrated "Michigan Adoption Day," hoping to draw attention to the adoption process and remind people that thousands of foster children need homes. Kent County holds its celebration next month, with courtrooms decked out for Christmas -- some judges in Santa outfits.

Across the nation, children 8 and older, particularly those with siblings, are among those hardest to place, Kent County adoption specialist Sandra Recker said.

"But, it's not impossible," she said.

Recker believes no child is unadoptable -- they just have not found families yet. Her heart breaks for children who become adults without being adopted.

"If Johnny is not adopted, where does he go for Christmas? As an adult, who's his family?" Recker asked.

Ned and Rinda, who live in the Grand Rapids area and asked that their last names be withheld for safety reasons, said the children are a blessing.

With their youngest in his third year in college, they never imagined adopting. Then they met Billy and Tanya, who were removed from their biological family.

"This is what the Lord wanted us to do," the mother said.

Once they made the decision, they talked to their older children. They hoped for support, but not all were thrilled. One said they were "nuts."

Then, they met their new brother and sister.

"We just fell in love with the kids," said Scott, a Kent County sheriff's deputy. "You know what? They are family."

His 33-year-old sister told her parents: "I always wanted a sister."

The adult children agreed if anything happens to the parents -- he's 58, she's 59 -- they would take in their new siblings.

Ned and Rinda knew raising the younger children would not be easy, but they have been pleasantly surprised. Billy has cognitive difficulties, and both had fallen behind in their education. But both have shown strong improvement with school work.

One of the biggest struggles is convincing the children they have a home, and a family, forever.

On Easter, after hunting for eggs, Billy asked if they would be around for the next Easter. Everything is new to the children: riding the couples' horses, going to the mall, swimming in a lake.

Billy said he likes his new parents. He likes math, and spelling, and has a "cool teacher." Friday nights are his favorite.

They have pizza and pop and watch movies.

Tanya loves her horse, Gus. She loves her new brothers and sister, too. She is especially glad to have her brother with her.

She's younger, but, "I look after him."

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